DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

PASADENA, CALIFORNIA 91125

THE POPULAR FRONT CPUSA AND THE REVOLUTION OF 1776: A STUDY IN "PATRIOTIC MARXISM"

David DeLeon

HUMANITIES WORKING PAPER 39

November 1979

The Popular Front CPUSA and the Revolution of 1776:
A Study in "Patriotic Marxism"

SYNOPSIS

During the 1930's the Communist Party of the United States, reflecting the programs of the Comintern, first rejected all forms of patriotism, and then developed a form of "socialist patriotism." This article summarizes what was defined as the orthodox Marxist position on nationalism during the Popular Front, and what was repudiated as "left sectarianism" and "right opportunism." This general theory is then applied to a specific historical case, the Revolution of 1776. The strengths and weaknesses of both the theory and the application are considered. While the article concludes that the theoretical rationale for linking Marxism and nationalism was generally plausible, the theory was vitiated by CP practice, which was neither genuinely nationalist nor internationalist, but expressed its character as the local representative of a specific country, the USSR. Nevertheless, the theory of what is termed "patriotic Marxism" remains important for analyzing modern nationalist revolutions and understanding the problems of the American Left in establishing a positive identity.

During the 1930's, the Communist Party of the United States provided several answers to the question of "what is the relationship between Marxism and patriotism?" Could a Communist praise and defend his or her country -- or were nationalist sentiments always a smokescreen to obscure the class struggle? Before 1935, the CPUSA responded that Marxism and patriotism were incompatible. One spokesman said that the main task of the CPUSA was to "bolshevize" the Party rather than to "Americanize" it." In 1935, this interpretation was abandoned -- for causes, ominously enough, that were outside of the United States. The Seventh Congress of the Comintern officially approved the call for a United Front of all progressives to defeat fascism. The startling result was a kind of "patriotic Marxism" expressed by Earl Browder, the leader of the CPUSA: "We Communists like this country. We cannot think of another spot on the globe that we would rather be than exactly this one. We love our country." He even proposed the slogan that"Communism is twentieth century Americanism."[2] By examining such diverse answers to this central problem of Marxism, we can illuminate both modern nationalist revolutions abroad, and the domestic failure of the American Left to achieve popular support.

Internationally, there can be no doubt of the significance of this issue. In the 1930's, the German Communist Party was severely weakened by its general concession of national symbols to

the Nazis. Similarly, trust in the French Communist Party was cracked by its support for the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact in 1939. Even 21 of the Party's 72 deputies in the national government were moved to resign. The behavior of these parties seemed to provide evidence for Leon Blum's comment that they were "alien sects" within their countries. These lessons of the 1930's, and later episodes, may finally have contributed to the French CP announcing, in February of 1976, that it wanted "communism under French colors," "a socialism for France." Santiago Carrillo, the leader of the Spanish CP, agreed that "for years, Moscow was our Rome. The Great October Revolution was our Christmas. But today we have grown up." The British, Italian and Yugoslavian parties have also tried to combine nationalism and Communism, as have many countries in the "third world." But few have developed an elaborate theory justifying an alliance of Marxism and patriotism. Thus, the CPUSA literature of the 1930's, when the subject was analyzed, remains of importance.[3]

Furthermore, a study of this literature can clarify a basic problem of the American Left, the popular characterization of it as "un-American," and its own antipathy toward most national symbols. In the 1930's, Dimitroff observed that "the American fascists appealed to the traditions of the American War of Independence [and] the traditions of Washington and Lincoln. ... American fascism tries to portray itself as a custodian of the Constitution and 'American democracy'." The Left would have to compete with such appeals. An independent Marxist, Leon Samson, recognized that "Americanism" was a kind of "substitute

socialism." So long as most Americans equated freedom, equality and opportunity with capitalism, socialism would be defeated. Radicals, he said, would have to demonstrate that socialism would fulfill "the American way of life," not annihilate it. Norman Thomas also argued that "socialism must speak the American language" and "deal with the American situation."[4] But it was not the Socialist Party of Thomas, but the CPUSA during the Popular Front that was the first American socialist party to energetically identify itself as the inheritor of indigenous traditions of dissent.

While it is true that this policy was not begun by the CPUSA, but by the influence of the USSR, its answers continue to be vital for all concerned with radical theory. The question of native roots for the Left is still the subject of comment. While such Communist parties as those of Cuba or Vietnam link their present revolutions with earlier struggles, American Marxists tend to dismiss all patriotic or national references as chauvinist. During the Vietnam War, for example, American radicals meeting with representatives of the National Liberation Front were once criticized because "you American friends have not yet found your identity: you do not identify with your own people or your country and its traditions." On another occasion, a U.S. delegation was greeted by the Vietnamese revolutionaries as "the finest sons and daughters of Washington and Jefferson."[5] But what rationale can be made for combining Marxism and patriotism? Marx, after all, said that "the working men have no country."[6]

Presumably, the only flag that the workers should honor is the red flag. Let us turn to the general theory of what this essay will call patriotic Marxism, and then outline how the 1930's CPUSA applied this theory to a specific historical event, the Revolution of 1776.

"Orthodox Marxism," in the 1930's, was defined by Stalin and Dimitroff. Both understood the powerful strength of nationalism. Stalin had been designated the Party authority on the national question even during Lenin's lifetime, and Georgi Dimitroff was the knowledgeable General Secretary of the Comintern. In 1935, they argued that patriotism was compatible with Marxism if it aided in the long-term advance of the working class toward power. At one point in history it might be progressive for a nation to free itself from the domination of another nation. At another point, consolidation of a state and the first stages of capitalist industrialization could foster a development toward socialism. Thus, the American Revolution, the early years of the Republic, and the Civil War could be heralded as progressive events which were the basis for higher forms of political and economic organization, and greater liberties for the masses. Marx, Engels and Lenin were quoted for this interpretation. In Lenin's words: "The history of modern, civilized America opened with one of those great, really liberating, really revolutionary wars of which there have been few ..."[7]

But what about the modern United States? The U.S. was no longer a colonial nation fighting to be free. Instead,

it was probably the major imperialist nation. Nevertheless, Stalin and Dimitroff asserted that patriotism still had to be harnessed by the Left. First, there was the practical fact that it could not be ignored. Dimitroff observed that nationalism had been one of the "main ideological instruments" of reaction. "Sneering" at national history was both supercilious and superficial. Nationalism was a powerful ideology that was deeply rooted in the history, language and culture of a people.

Second, the Comintern stated that only Communism would serve the best interests of these historic communities, and especially of their working masses. Capitalism was described as representing a minority of every nation, while the CP stood for "a truly national culture" (in Dimitroff's words). Marx, in his comments immediately after the sentence that "the working men have no country," had added that insofar as the proletariat "must constitute itself the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word." Browder interpreted all of this to mean that "Communism and patriotism do not exclude one another. ... If patriotism means not idle boasting and arrogant assumptions of superiority, but the defense of the interests of the great majority of the working people of the nation, then the Communists of this and every other land are among the best patriots."[8] Under capitalism, would Negroes ever be equal with whites? Would workers achieve full security? Would women attain equal status with men? The Communist answer was no, and thus the Party could reconcile the class struggle with patriotism. Modern Communists could laud

earlier movements for popular rights (even if those movements were non-socialist), just as Marx had praised the bourgeois revolutionaries for their references to the classical world for "the purpose of glorifying the new struggle."[9]

In practice, the American CP was urged to join all struggles to defend and expand "bourgeois democracy," even while understanding the limits of such struggles. As Lenin was quoted: "The more complete, determined and consistent the bourgeois revolution is, the more secure will be the proletarian struggle against the bourgeoisie for socialism become."[10] When the limits of capitalism and bourgeois democracy had been approached, radicals must agitate for socialism and proletarian democracy. For that day, the workers must maintain their separate organizations, develop a greater class consciousness, and eventually perceive that "bourgeois nationalism" was essentially for a few. The capitalists were presented as either fickle friends or enemies of the ultimate best interests of the nation.[11]

After patriotism had helped to make the Marxist revolution, would it vanish? No, it would continue. While Engels had argued that the state was founded to protect private property, and later Marxists had commented that that the national state developed to insure markets, such states would not quickly wither away under socialism (although this remained the ideal in Lenin's State and Revolution, written in 1917). Nations, after all, were not artificial, but had complex bases in reality, where different physical and historical environments

had produced different "psychologies."[12] As Lenin had observed: "national and state differences among people and countries ... will continue to exist for a very long time, even after the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established on a world scale."[13] While all states should be proletarian in content, they could still be national in form. Of course, the goal remained the breaking down of "national egoism," the creation of international ties among workers, and the evolution toward a single culture and a single language. It was believed that capitalism had already begun this process of centralization and standardization (illustrated by the homogenization of the American population). Communism would further accelerate this process.

But Marxists who considered themselves orthodox said that this tendency toward "amalgamation" should not be forced. Lenin had urged a "special sincerity" and "special ingenuity" in dealing with local languages and customs within "a free union of nations in socialism." Lenin endorsed, for each national culture within the Soviet Union, its own independent theatres, press, schools, and cultural institutions. He argued that a national culture could be progressive, and compatible with Marxism, if it was defined as pride in the popular conflicts of the past, and the best heritage of a common language, traditions and economic development. Furthermore, such traditions did not have to be working class, so long as their class limitations were recognized.[14]

It was assumed that socialist countries would naturally "confederate" for "the fraternal collaboration of

people." Dimitroff even spoke of the potential goal of a Union of Socialist Republics of the Americas. Socialist nations would presumably realize their common interests and avoid "local chauvinism," joining into what Stalin called "a voluntary union of nations." The USSR, then, was presented as "the living prototype of the future union of nations into a single world economic system."[15] In such a community of people, patriotism would finally disappear, but not before it had been used, by theoretically correct Marxists, for a progressive role. This was the theory. Given the silence or vagueness of Marx and Engels on nationalism, and Lenin's commission of Stalin to write on the national question, it was a reasonably coherent position, however divergent it might have been from the universalistic hopes of Marx.

Stalin and Dimitroff designated this orthodox Marxism. Its deviations were labelled left sectarianism and right opportunism. Left sectarianism was the old line: that the workers had no homeland and no flag but the red flag, that FDR, Norman Thomas and others were really forerunners of fascism, while the CPUSA stood for immediately "storming capitalism" for the creation of a Soviet America under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Dimitroff now denounced this as "self-satisfied sectarianism" that was playing with super-militant, violent slogans that drove away potential Communists and potential allies. While total internationalism might be the goal, it was simplistic, doctrinaire and offensive to assert this as an immediate demand, as though there were no intermediate stages. By this "ultraleft" rejection of all patriotism, the Party became isolated from many, and national symbols were

monopolized by liberal and reactionary elements. Dimitroff further declared that instead of denying patriotism, a practice that he called "national nihilism," the correct strategy would be to argue that only socialism could achieve the full potential of the nation's masses, and that only international cooperation could secure a prosperous and lasting peace for all.[16]

The opposite deviation was termed right opportunism. If left sectarianism meant "all struggle, no alliance," the right deviation meant the reverse. (Although this phrase comes from Mao Tse-tung, the essence was expressed by other Marxist leaders of the 1930's.) The characteristics of right opportunism were: neglect of theory for activism, liberal or moderate slogans, a loosely organized party of many classes, and "tailing" rather than leading movements for change. While the left deviation thought that everything could be accomplished by correct theory, regardless of material opportunities, the right deviation was too accomodating to things as they were. Applied to the national question, the right opportunist did not emphasize the class limitations of the old patriotism, but tended to become a chauvinistic glorifier of the nation. For the "orthodox Marxist," nationalism could not be properly understood without an international context.

The practice of this theory can be illustrated by the CPUSA's interpretation of the Revolution of 1776. How was the CP going to relate to what it called "the first American revolution"? First, it stated that the ideology of the Revolution had been radical

and internationalist for its day. The revolutionaries had learned from the French rationalists, some British political writers, and other advanced thinkers of the 1770's. For this, the Tories had denounced them as "alien." The revolutionaries had brushed aside such criticisms, using their ideology to inform the masses with a comprehensive sense of the magnitude of their suffering, why this had happened, and how it could be changed. While this ideology drew upon local traditions also, it was not chauvinist: the war, in theory, was for the "self-evident" rights of humanity as well as the traditional, hard-won "rights of Englishmen." This ideology attracted considerable international support, including Lafayette, Paine, von Steuben, Pulaski, deKalb, Rochambeau, Kosciusko and legions of others. The revolutionaries -- again, despite the complaints of what the CPUSA described as "the Hearsts of 1776" -- formed alliances where they could, even though it be the Catholic, absolute monarchy of France.

Publicly, then, the Revolution had been justified by grand, universal ideals that had achieved a significant degree of international allegiance. These ideals included the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, powers of constituent assemblies, popularly-formed constitutions, separation of church and state, freedoms of speech, press and assembly. Browder was correct, if exaggerated, when he declared that:

> our American giants of 1776 were the 'international incendiaries' of their day. They inspired revolutions throughout the world. The great French Revolution, the reverberations of which filled Europe's ears for the entire nineteenth century, took its first steps under

> the impulse given by the American revolution. The Declaration of Independence was for that time what the Communist Manifesto is for ours. Copy all the most hysterical Hearst editorials of today against Moscow, Lenin, Stalin, substitute the words America, Washington, Jefferson, and the result is an almost verbatim copy of the diatribes of English and European reactionary politicians against our American founding fathers. Revolution was then 'an alien doctrine imported from America' as now it is 'imported from Moscow.'[17]

Browder was not pleading, however, for a return to 1776 -- each era and each class had its own "tasks" -- but to fulfill, in a modern way, the original principles.

Second, it was noted that the means for the change had been revolutionary. Unlike Canada, which slowly evolved toward independence, or the later Latin American republics where a small elite took power in a coup, the United States was founded by a long, violent struggle involving much of its population. During this war, the Tories were sometimes terrorized, their presses seized or destroyed, and some of their property confiscated. They were suppressed so that the majority could be free. Perhaps 100,000 fled to the Bermudas, Antiquas, Nassau, Canada or England during the first successful anti-colonial conflict of modern times. The CPUSA commented that our nation had been founded by subversion, treason and armed struggle.[18]

Third, the results were revolutionary. Despite all of the local particularism of the colonies, the conclusion of the war had brought what the CPUSA called "national self-determination" or "national liberation." Economically, this was positive because it freed American capitalism from mercantilist controls, and the

general restraints of foreign, aristocratic society. Politically, the new nation was a "vanguard country," the most advanced of that time in the world. "The sovereignty of the king" was replaced by "the sovereignty of the people," who were now the source of power, including the right of eminent domain. The CPUSA concluded that "it is a basic proposition in the common law of America that all property is only held in trust by individual owners on behalf of the people as a whole."[19]

In practical terms, the republic swept away any vestiges of feudalism and immediately contributed to the extension of democratic rights. Confiscation broke up some of the land monopolies and "landed aristocracies" which British policy had favored. For example, the immense estate of James DeLancey of New York was sold to 275 different people; that of Roger Morris, also of New York, to nearly 250 people. Voting rights were expanded; the importation of slaves was halted by nearly all of the Southern states and slavery was abolished by many of the northern states in a few decades. The social ferment of the revolution also prompted some of the first writings for the equality of women and blacks. While the CP occasionally interpreted the Constitution as a counter-revolution, it also created a progressive bourgeois state where a Bill of Rights secured major democratic liberties.

Browder further noted that the U.S. was ruled by a one-party government for approximately two decades, with both Hamilton and Jefferson within Washington's cabinet (although Browder gave no necessary approval to either factionalism, or the later development of parties). Defenders of the progressive aspects of this state

had to defeat traitors (Aaron Burr was compared to Bukharin!), accusations of Jacobinism, allegations that "French gold" was supporting the democrats, Federalist seceders in 1812 (supposedly the wicked Trotskyists of that day), repressive legislation like the Alien and Sedition Acts, and the growing power of such undemocratic, "Tory" institutions as the Supreme Court were also noted. For decades, the United States was attacked for its "radical" institutions based upon values declared to be universally valid.[20]

Fourth, the CPUSA drew modern parallels to its own internationalist ideology (as best serving the interests of the nation), its own militance and goals of basic change. It applauded earlier battles, but it claimed that these, however glorious, had been inconclusive. Thus, while the revolution of 1776 may have cast off the burdens of mercantilism and established a bourgeois republic, and while the Civil War may have abolished an entire form of property, chattel slavery, only socialism could fully liberate the masses. It was in this sense that Marx and Lenin had commended the American War of Independence and the Civil War as revolutionary. Both had pointed to these events for their lessons about successes and failures, and the need for new and greater efforts.[21]

This basic position was maintained, with various fluctuations, from about 1935 to the mid-1940's, although fragments of it could be found decades later. In 1944, the CPUSA became the Communist Political Association, an event accompanied by the enthusiastic singing of the Star-Spangled

Banner. This was no surface change. Many members and leaders of the Party believed that the post-war period would be one of economic, social and political advance, and that the Communists could work most effectively as a pressure group, rather than a Marxist-Leninist party. Browder, as the Communist leader, asserted that American capitalism was deeply rooted and vigorously adaptable: "We 'Reds' and 'Bolsheviks' have much more confidence in the strength of capitalism in this country than has, for example, Herbert Hoover"! The CPUSA, assuming the hardy longevity of this basic system, transformed itself into "a non-party organization of Americans which [carried] forward the tradition of Washington, Jefferson, Paine, Jackson and Lincoln, under the changed conditions of modern industrial society."[22]

During the previous years, this "bourgeois communism" (as Lenin had once scornfully termed such phenomena) had been regularly criticized by Trotskyists, Social Democrats and DeLeonists -- Arnold Petersen of the SLP calling it "an uninhibited orgy of opportunism."[23] While the critiques of many of these groups came from what has been called left sectarian politics, the CP of Earl Browder was finally condemned by Jacques Duclos of the French Communist Party (and, by implication, Stalin) for its "notorious revision of Marxism."[24] Duclos denied that American Communism could avoid what he considered the laws of orthodox Marxism: that class contradictions between labor and capital would continue, that reforms were possible but insufficient, and that the final necessity of "the conquest of power" would not be easily achieved. What Duclos did not mention were the two central

flaws of the CPUSA (and most Communist parties) in their attempt to assimilate nationalism.

First, the CPUSA was not an independent party but passively followed the lead of the USSR. The Soviet party had actively encouraged those American views that were later denounced. Stalin had certainly indulged in "chauvinist nationalism" in many of his writings and speeches on "the Great Patriotic War" of the Soviet Motherland against the German invader. The CPUSA, despite all of its patriotic rhetoric, took these cues from abroad. In May of 1944, there was unanimous Party support for Browder; after Duclos' letter, in July of 1945, there was almost complete opposition. The impetus for this change came from Duclos, not because of internal Party debate. While it is true that there was some discussion within the leadership -- William Z. Foster apparently criticized Browder -- discussion was absent from the Party press.[25]

While the ideas of the CPUSA were inherently important, the origin of them, and the abruptness with which they were adopted, tended to arouse the suspicion and hostility of many. Even those who were attracted by Dimitroff's call to "acclimatize" Communism within each country would soon be shocked when the CPUSA made another violent switch during World War Two. American Communists, it seemed, could still learn from the spirited controversies that were conducted by Lenin and others within the Bolshevik party before basic policies were decided. Instead, the CPUSA was caught, by its own voluntary choice, in the contradictions that Leon Blum was to recognize. Communist parties tended to be

neither indigenous, nor internationalist, but local representatives of a specific country, the USSR. Under these unfavorable circumstances, most Americans justifiably responded with complete cynicism to the CPUSA's claim that it was the champion of the best heritage of American society. Because of the lack of Party democracy, and local initiative, CP oratory about radical continuity was not believable.

John Gates, the editor-in-chief of the Daily Worker, finally recognized this contradiction. He noticed that while Eugene Debs had been villified by the government, and condemned to Atlanta Penitentiary, he had nonetheless received one million votes for the Presidency in 1920. Debs was often perceived as an advocate of civil liberties and an opponent of unjust wars. Gates asked why the CPUSA -- which was, in theory, defending many of the same principles -- lacked such popular support. He concluded that the CP statements had been fundamentally dishonest, and isolated the Party from the American public. Gates knew that Party leaders like Betty Gannett and V.J. Jerome were living in a fantasy world when they said: "We have only to look about us, at ourselves and our comrades throughout this country, to see how organically we are part of the American working class; how we look, speak, act, and feel with the American people, because we are of the people."[26]

Second -- and partly because of the first deficiency -- the Communist Party had neglected Marxist education within the Party, emphasizing both practical activity and dogmatic repetition of ritualistic phrases. While the Party could distribute over a

half-million copies of a political document by Stalin in one year, it reached only one-fifth that number for the Communist Manifesto and State and Revolution, and a tiny number for Capital. Even the Party schools favored collections of "facts" rather than a basic knowledge of dialectical materialism. Such impoverished Marxism was fit mainly for polemics and predictions. Theory did not control the politics of the Party; the demands of politics controlled theory. Ideas were just so many weapons or tools; for one "job" a certain instrument was best; for another, a different one. The overall strategy was lost. Thus, there was no consistent perception of both the strengths and limitations of the Popular Front, no preparation for the possibility of a non-aggression pact to defend the Soviet Union. Rather, the CPUSA drifted with the current. It knew its position essentially by its political relation to the USSR, not by what it had always called "the science of Marxism."[27]

In the years after 1945, the CPUSA never made a thorough analysis of the positive and negative elements of Popular Front patriotism. It did the easy thing by purging Browder and his (now few) followers, and labelling some of the slogans and practices of that era "Browderism," while maintaining others. Thus, during the anti-Communist trials of the 1950's CP leaders continued to cite Jefferson in defense of free speech, praised the Constitution, and stated that they were defending the rights of all Americans. Their arguments, if overstated, were not without merit, but CP practice made them suspect of fraud.

A third general flaw in the CPUSA's perspective -- noted by Duclos -- was that, even in its own terms, it was not orthodox Marxist. Before 1935, the CPUSA was left sectarian; after 1935 (along with other Communist parties, however) it rapidly became right opportunist. By 1946, it was simply thoroughly confused.

Let us begin with the basic question of theory. Because the Popular Front emphasized the immediate utility of history, the CPUSA rushed into a polemical use of patriotism without defining what should have been (by its Marxist values) the most elementary issue about the revolution of 1776: what economic and class forces caused the revolution and most benefited from it? Instead, ill-defined terms were bandied about: "a rising capitalism" had crushed a "dying feudalism"; "the people" fought for "democracy" and "the coming to manhood of the American nation" (!); while "tory recation" had opposed "the camp of democracy" and "national independence." These are all ahistorical banalities. The CPUSA apparently believed that it was sufficient, for Popular Front purposes, to claim some bond with this earlier event and -- if it was desired to promote socialism at the same time -- perhaps to assert that just as colonial society had not served the interests of its masses, today the existence of idle land, idle factories and idle workers proved the need for a new revolution. But this was not Marxist analysis; it was simply radical journalism.

Struggle itself is not inherently radical. It is vital to understand who is struggling for what. The CPUSA, however, tended to stress the quantitative question of changes in the form of democracy

rather than the qualitative question of the content of democratic struggles. It may be stirring to read such militant stories by Howard Fast as Conceived in Liberty (1939), The Unvanquished (1942), Citizen Tom Paine (1943), Patrick Henry (1945) and The Proud and the Free (1950, yet Fast seems to write no differently as a self-identified Marxist and Party member, in these books, than he did years later when he left the Party, in a revolutionary war novel like The Crossing (1971). While the emphasis on conflict is important -- since the workers' rights have not been gained simply because of capitalism's generosity -- the content and context of all struggles must be sharply explicit. Otherwise we abstractly discuss "the people" without appreciating the differing statuses of blacks, women, indentured servants and many others. Ignoring or downplaying such dimensions will rapidly idealize the American Revolution and the establishment of a bourgeois republic. As Engels characterized the reality of the "universal ideals of the Enlightenment":

> We know today that this kingdom of reason was nothing more than the idealized kingdom of the bourgeoisie; that eternal justice found its realization in bourgeois justice; that equality reduced itself to bourgeois equality before the law; that bourgeois property was proclaimed as one of the essential rights of man; and that the government of reason, the Social Contract of Rousseau, came into existence as a bourgeois-democratic republic. No more than their predecessors could the great thinkers of the eighteenth century pass beyond the limits imposed on them by their own epoch.[29]

The CPUSA neglected analyzing the essence of earlier movements, and, instead, noticed only surface resemblances. While

it may be true that working class movements can draw lessons from middle class movements, it is not self-evident that "the Communist Party carried forward the democratic elements of Jefferson [and] Paine."[30] Thomas Jefferson was not Karl Marx; Paine was not Lenin; bourgeois revolution was not proletarian revolution; laissez-faire radicalism was not a transition to state communism.

Because of this failure to establish the nature of the conflict of 1776, the CPUSA necessarily committed many other errors. It published eulogistic books on Thomas Paine (the every model of a petty bourgeois radical), Thomas Jefferson (a laissez-faire liberal), Benjamin Franklin (the quintessential entrepreneur) and even George Washington. The CP attempted to transform these middle class leaders into proto-Communists, rather than saying merely that they were progressive, in many ways, in their own time. To the contrary, the CPUSA offered excuses for their limitations. Thus, George Washington would have been more humane if he had been better informed, and Paine would have been a Jacobin if only he had been more fluent in French. Sam Adams was praised without any real understanding that he was, both religiously and economically, a reactionary (that is a Calvinist and a mercantilist).[31] Benjamin Franklin received the astonishing title of "the forerunner of Marx" (Carl Reeve) because he was the first to define wage-labor and value (Sam Darcy) and because of his "profound understanding of private property" (J. Mindell). Granville Hicks surpassed this with a comparison of Franklin and Lenin, noting that both were idealists who were tactically flexible. This was undiluted romantic nonsense, leading to an article in the theoretical journal of the CPUSA avowing that

"in America, only the workers and democratic forces can draw new strength from the ideals of Benjamin Franklin."[32] The failure to achieve theoretical clarity by defining the forces responsible for the American Revolution may have led inevitably to theoretical confusion throughout the CPUSA's perspective on this period of American history.

This included peculiar pamphlets, flatulent oratory on the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving, or such bizarre episodes as Browder placing a portrait of Washington in his office next to that of Lenin, but, more seriously, these philosophical errors fostered a dangerous underestimate of the repressive potential of capitalist rule. Political Affairs seemed genuinely surprised that the U.S. was playing such a reactionary role in the post-WWII era. Arnold Johnson was moved to exclaim that support of Greece, Chiang Kai-shek and Spain "brings shame and disgrace to America, and violates our traditions of 1776."[33] This was idealism, not Marxism.

Another characteristic of right opportunism, mentioned earlier, was the tendency for the Party to become submerged in other movements and to lose its distinctive Communist identity. The CPUSA was active in New Deal projects and CIO organizing, but not openly as the CPUSA. While it maintained much of its organizational discipline, even while working within "front groups," it both neglected the theoretical education of its membership about the limits of such groups (so far as the CP should have been concerned), and obscured its public presence. It grew more and more conciliatory. One logical conclusion of its nationalism was to downgrade or even

deny class conflict: "There are no economic classes in America. There is only one class, the American people."[34] This accelerating process toward right opportunism led to the formal dissolution of the Party.

These factors contributed heavily to the fourth, the extensive presence of bourgeois intellectuals in the Party during the Popular Front. They could accept and even admire a watered-down Marxism, and there was no real Party effort to educate them. These people, in turn, stimulated the further degeneration of the Party by their vulgar empiricism. The non-Party radical Matthew Josephson said that Marx was "timely"; Howard Fast later called Marxism and the CP his "God"; Granville Hicks praised "the moral judgments of Marxism"; Richard Wright said that "it was not the economics of Communism, nor the great power of trade unions, nor even the excitement of underground politics that claimed me" (!), but the sense of "brotherhood" that the Party represented. Many of these people were openly or privately convinced that capitalism could peacefully evolve into socialism. They hoped, like John Gates (later editor of the Party newspaper) that the Popular Front would become a "permanent feature of Communist theory and practice." Gates was one of many like George Charney, who later confessed that they were drawn to the United Front "by instinct."

So long as these intellectuals remained in the Party, they fully justified Lenin's prediction that such people "omit, obliterate, and distort the revolutionary side of [Marxism], its revolutionary soul; they push to the foreground and extol what it, or seems, acceptable to the bourgeoisie." The result, Lenin

said, was "that half-baked, eclectic outlook, that hash of contradictory principles and points of view, that tendency to climb past difficult problems on a bridge of words and to conceal with phrases the historic struggle between various sections of the population, which Marx so unmercifully castigated with sarcasm." When their scholastic Marxism of phrases and predictions "didn't work," they rather quickly found "new solutions." Budenz migrated to the Catholic Church, and Hicks published a utopian novel in 1940 (though he later settled into the comfortable skepticism of a liberal). It is not surprising that liberals have occasionally lamented the failure of the CPUSA to follow the "moderate" policies of such Communists in form, but liberals or Fabian Socialists in substance as George Charney, John Gates, Howard Fast, Al Richmond and Joseph Starobin.[35]

Despite all of these criticisms, however, the CPUSA made a significant attempt to rediscover and revive a sense of radical continuity. While its theories, analogies and practices were often flawed, it seriously tried to end the estrangement between Marxism and the American people. But, decades later, Marxism still appears bizarrely alien to almost all in this country, while most Left groups publish literature that reads as though it had been composed by the editors of China Reconstructs or Pravda. American radicalism, however much it may draw upon the experiences of other cultures, must be rooted in its own environment. It requires an American vocabulary, an American history, American goals and American methods. The years of the Popular Front can still teach us about the dangers

of chauvinism and abstract internationalism, along with the possibilities for learning from the people's struggles of the past in order to understand the present and to prepare for the future.[36]

FOOTNOTES

1. William Z. Foster, Toward Soviet America , (NY: Coward-McCann, 1932); Alexander Bittelman, "For Leninism -- For a Soviet America," The Communist, 14 (Jan. 1935), 6-22. For some literary expressions of this interpretation, see Jack Parker, "Two Flags," New Pioneer, 2 (July 1933), 6-7 (a descendent of Betsy Ross makes a new flag -- red, with a hammer and sickle), and Jack Dennis, "The Boston Tea Party," New Pioneer, 3 (July 1933), 51-52, 64 (the Revolution was, apparently, a plot by the callous, money-hungry bourgeoisie). For another illustration of pre-Popular Front comments, see "Disguised as Marxists," New Masses, 10 (Feb. 20, 1934). The Socialists often criticized books like Toward Soviet America for their escape from American realities (i.e. David Berenberg, American Socialist Quarterly, 1 [Summer 1932], 56-63).

   This essay is a portion of a larger work on "Modern Radicalism and the 'Usable Past' of the American Revolution."

2. Browder, What Is Communism? (NY: Vanguard Press, 1936), 13. He denied the "slanderous" interpretation that the new policy meant that the old had been fallacious -- and adopted the Popular Front without a theoretical discussion (Browder, "Build the United People's Front" [NY: Worker's Library, 1936], 6).

3. John T. Marcus, French Socialism in the Crisis Years, 1933-1939 (NY: Praeger, 1958); Leon Blum, For All Mankind (NY: Viking, 1946); Francis W. Coker, "Patriotism," Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (NY: Macmillan, 1934), XII, 27; Emil Lengyel, Nationalism -- The Last Stage of Communism (NY: Funk and Wagnalls, 1969); Horace B. Davis, Nationalism and Socialism: Marxist and Labor Theories of Nationalism to 1917 (NY: Monthly Review, 1973 [1967]) -- a sequel, carrying the subject to the present, is almost completed; Anthony Smith, Theories of Nationalism (NY: Harper and Row, 1971); Vladimir Kusin, "Socialism and Nationalism," in The Socialist Idea, ed. Leszek Kolakowski (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), 145-52 (and Peter Ludz, "Socialism and the Nation," pp. 134-44); Marxism-Leninism on Proletarian Internationalism (Moscow: Progress, 1972); Boyd C. Shafer, Faces of Nationalism: New Realities and Old Myths (NY: Harcourt, 1974); Tom Nairn, "The Modern Janus," New Left Review, no. 94 (Nov.-Dec. 1975), 3-29; Michael Loewy, "Marxists and the National Question," New Left Review, no. 96 (March-April, 1976), 81-100; Militant, 40 (March 19, 1976), 19; "Brezhnev Discusses Import [importance] of Proletarian Internationalism," Daily World, 1 July 1976, p. 6; "A Show of Independence," Newsweek, 88 (July 12, 1976), 33-34.

4. Georgi Dimitroff, The United Front (San Francisco: Proletarian Publishers, 1975), 41, 78 (speech to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, 1935); Samson's work is discussed in Frank A. Warren, An Alternative Vision: The Socialist Party in the 1930's (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1974), 54-69; Norman Thomas, New Leader, (Nov. 14, 1925), 1,3; (Nov. 21, 1925), 1-2; (Nov. 28, 1925), 1-2.

5. Several examples are quoted in a non-Marxist pamphlet representing the "revolutionary nationalist" position, "Toward a New Patriotism" (Cicero, Illinois: Johnny Appleseed Patriotic Publications, 197?). Susan Sontag also recorded such remarks in her Trip to Hanoi (NY: Farrar, Straus and Girous, 1968).

   Thoughtful comments on American Patriotism include James Rowland Angell, "The Higher Patriotism" (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Pamphlets, 1938); Percy Boynton, "Changing Ideas of American Patriotism" (Chicago: University of Chicago, Public Policy Pamphlets, 1936); Merle Curti, The Roots of American Loyalty (NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1946); Morton Grodzins, The Loyal and the Disloyal: Social Boundaries of Patriotism and Treason (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956); Hans Kohn, American Nationalism; An Interpretive Essay (NY: Macmillan, 1957); and Joseph Morray, Pride of State: A Study in Patriotism and American National Morality Boston: Beacon Press, 1959).

6. Marx, Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1968), 55; analyzed by Roman Rosdolsky, in "Worker and Fatherland: A Note on a Passage in The Communist Manifesto," Science and Society, 29 (Summer 1965).

7. Lenin, "Letter to American Workers" (NY: New Outlook, 1970), 25. Other references are given in Rudy Baker, "Lenin and the American Revolutionary Tradition," The Communist, 18 (Jan. 1939), 36ff.

8. Earl Browder, The Second Imperialist War (NY: International 1940), 74-75. Both Lenin and Stalin had written extensively on the national question, with an emphasis on the right of self-determination, but with occasional references to the subject of patriotism: how was a Marxist to respond to national culture? (Or, contemporary Marxists might ask, to the "national cultures" of Chicanos, blacks, Indians and Puerto Ricans.) Most of the following writings were available to American Marxists in the 1930's: Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self-Determination; Selected Writings (NY: International 1951); Lenin, The National-Liberation Movement in the East (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962); Stalin, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question (NY: International, 1939); and Selections from V.I. Lenin and J.V. Stalin (Calcutta, India: Calcutta Book House, 1970).

9. Marx, quoted in V.J. Jerome, "Communism for Americans," The Communist, 15 (March 1936), 275; Robert Minor, "Somebody is 'Distressed' -- But not Karl Marx," The Communist, 15 (Sept. 1935), 830-50; A.B. Magil, "An Answer to Ernest Boyd," New Masses, 18 (Jan. 14, 1936), 19.

10. Lenin, Selected Works (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1936), III, 75.

11. Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question" (1913), in Collected Works (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), XX, 23-26; Lenin, "On the National Pride of the Great Russians" (1914), ibid., XXI, 102-06. Mao Tse-tung, generally unknown to the Americans, dealt with many of the same issues in the 1930's and 1940's (some of the theoretical questions were implied, however, in articles on him in the Daily Worker). See "On the Question of the National Bourgeoisie and the Enlightened Gentry," Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1969), IV, 207-10, and "The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War," Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tse-tung (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1971), 139-40.

12. Joseph Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question: (1913; considered a basic work for decades), in Marxism and the National and Colonial Question (NY: International, 1934), 8.

13. Quoted in Stalin, "Deviations on the National Question" (1930), in Selections from V.I. Lenin and J.V. Stalin on the National and Colonial Question (Calcutta, India: Calcutta Book House, 1970), 183-89.

14. Lenin, "On the Slogan for a United States of Europe" (1914), in Selected Works (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1936, V. 141; Lenin, "The Question of Nationalities, or 'Autonomisation'," The Lenin Anthology, ed. Robert C. Tucker (NY: Norton, 1975), 719-24.

15. Stalin, Foundations of Leninism (NY: International 1939), 85. For a later statement of the ideal that national cultures can be preserved and developed within a federation, see The Great Soviet Encyclopedia (NY: Macmillan, 1973), I, 102, 107, 440, 514-16. Of course, this theory is also maintained in all recent Soviet publications describing the USSR as "a family of nations" where "socialist patriotism" has "done away with national enmity and the great power contempt for aliens" (see "Patriotism and Internationalism" in The Soviet Way of Life [Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974], 238-43 ... although the last quotation is from page 224). For some critical treatments of the "pseudo-federalism" of the USSR -- that is, how the theory actually works -- see Zev Katz (ed.), Handbook of Major Soviet Nationalities (NY: The Free Press, 1975), especially the investigation by Richard Pipes, "The Nationality Problem." Other helpful studies include Vernon

V. Aspaturian, "The Non-Russian Nationalities," in Prospects for Soviet Society, ed. Allen Kassof (NY: Praeger, 1964), 143-98, and Lowell Tillet, The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969).

16. For a pre-Popular Front denunciation of FDR, see Earl Browder, speech to the Thirteenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, Jan. 1934, in The Communist International, Jan. 15, 1934, 75-77. If one accepts Dimitroff's definition, then both Marx and Lenin could be convicted of various "left sectarian" statements. For example, Lenin once dogmatically asserted that "Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism, be it even of the 'most just,' 'purest' most refined and civilized brand" (Selections from V.I. Lenin and J.V. Stalin on the National Colonial Question, p. 9). But Lenin was finally compelled to deal with this issue. Others to the purist Left of Lenin, refused to do so. Some examples can be found in Trotskyist writings: "Thesis on the World Role of American Imperialism" and "The Defense of the Fatherland," in Documents of the Fourth International; The Formative Years, 1933-1940 (NY: Pathfinder, 1973), 242-51, 318-19 ("Against the reactionary slogan of 'national defense' it is necessary to advance the slogan of the revolutionary destruction of the national state," p. 319); Leon Trotsky, "A Step Towards Social-Patriotism," in The Writings of Leon Trotsky (NY: Merit, 1969), 22-25.

17. "What Is Communism? 8.) Americanism -- Who are the Americans?" New Masses, 15 (June 25, 1935), 13.

18. Joe Clark, "Appeasers in American History," Clarity: Theoretical Organ of the Young Communist League, USA, 2 (Summer 1941), 69-81; Allen Brody, "A New Word for Treason," New Masses, 31 (April 11, 1939), 13.

19. Browder, "Earl Browder Says" (NY: Worker's Library, 1941), 22-23; Browder, Communism in the United States (NY: International, 1935).

20. Gene Dennis and Gil Green, "Notes on the Defense of American Democracy," The Communist, 17 (May 1938), 410-18; Earl Browder, "Concerning American Revolutionary Traditions," The Communist, 17 (Dec. 1938), 1079-85; Browder, "Traitors in American History: Lessons of the Moscow Trials" (NY: Worker's Library, 1938), 24; "Earl Browder Talks to Senators on the Real Meaning of the Voorhis 'Blacklist' Bill" (NY: Workers's Library, 1940); Browder, introduction to "The Constitution of the United States" (NY: International, 1937), 5; Browder, "Concerted Action or Isolation: Which Road to Peace?" (NY: International, 1938); Stanley Archer, "Historical Errata?" New Masses, 56 (July 24, 1945), 17-18. The most significant book length studies, all published by International, were Jack Hardy, The First American Revolution (1937), Herbert Morais, The Struggle for American Freedom (1944) and Avrom Landy, Marxism and the Democratic Tradition (1946).

21. Some of Marx and Engels' writings were later collected as The Civil War in the United States (NY: International, 1937), and Letters to Americans, 1848-1895; A Selection (NY: International, 1953). In addition, the contents of the following book, although in article form, was generally available: Lenin on the United States of America (Moscow: Progress Publishers, n.d.).

22. Preamble to CPA, quoted in Earl Browder, "The Road Ahead: To Victory and Lasting Peace" (NY: Worker's Library, 1944), 27; Browder, "Is Communism a Menace? A Debate Between Earl Browder and George Sokolsky" (NY: Worker's Library, 1943), 31.

23. The other radical groupings of the 1930's and early 1940's never had any "patriotic" emphasis like the breadth and depth of the CPUSA. The Socialist Party had some pamphlets, such as two by Dan Hoan: "Abraham Lincoln: A Real American" and "The Heritage of Debs," but Social Democratic education was in general principles, rather than searching for native roots. Consult, for an overview, Mark Starr, "Workers' Education Today" (NY: League for Industrial Democracy, 1941); or Harry Laidler (ed.), "League for Industrial Democracy: Forty Years of Education" (NY: LID, 1945). The Social Democrats were generally appalled by the Communists' abrupt change: what had happened to the social fascists? The class traitors? The revolutionary masses? (Haim Kantorovich, review of Earl Browder's What Is Communism? in The American Socialist Quarterly, 5 [April 1936], 28-29).

24. Jacques Duclos, "On the Dissolution of the Communist Party of the United States," Daily Worker, May 24, 1945; Maurice Thorez, "On the American Communists," New Masses, 56 (July 24, 1945), 18.

25. Joseph Stalin, The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union (NY: International, 1946). The later orthodoxy was best expressed by Gil Green in "The Browderite Conception of History," Political Affairs, 28 (Oct. 1949), 65-84.

26. Gannett and Jerome, "On Patriotism and National Pride," Political Affairs, 33 (Oct. 1954), 29; Eugene Dennis, Fighting Words (NY: New Century, 1949), 78; Eugene Dennis, Ideas They Cannot Jail (NY: International, 1950), 11-12, 17; 13 Communists Speak to the Court (NY: New Century, 1953); John Gates, The Story of an American Communist (NY: Thomas Nelson, 1958), 141-42; Herbert Aptheker, Dare We Be Free? The Meaning of the Attempt to Outlaw the Communist Party (NY: Citizens' Committee for Constitutional Liberties, 1961), 108. General background for this essay can be found in Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, The American Communist Party (NY: Praeger, 1962), and David Shannon, The Decline of American Communism (NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1959).

27. Howard Selsam, "The People Go to School," New Masses, 50 (Feb. 8, 1944), 14; Browder, "The Struggle for a People's Front in the United States," The Communist International, 14 (June 1937), 391-96; Granville Hicks, "What Shall I Read?" (1938), in Granville Hicks in the New Masses, ed. Jack Alan Robbins (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1974), 419-20. To place these theoretical deficiencies into a larger context, see Paul Sweezy, "The Influence of Marxism Economics on American Thought and Practice," in Socialism and American Life, ed. D.D. Egbert and Stow Persons (vol. 2; Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1952); Paul Buhle, "Marxism in the United States," in Towards a New Marxian, ed. Bart Grahl and Paul Piccone (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1973), 191-215: Buhle, "American Marxist Historiography, 1900-1940," Radical America, 4 (Nov. 1970), 5-35; and William Appleman Williams, The Great Evasion (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1964).

Howard Fast, who was a militant and dedicated member of the Party for years, unintentionally presented some fascinating proof of how un-Marxist a CP member could be. In his resignation, he listed the sources of his thought as Judaism, Jesus, Jefferson, Lincoln, G.B. Shaw, Jack London, Upton Sinclair, C. Osborne Ward, Veblen, Morgan -- and Marx and Engels: He further osbsrved: "I became a Marxist [?] within my own personal structure, as I think many people do" (from "My Decision," Mainstream, 10 [March 1957], 29-38).

28. After some Party criticism, Fast did make the last-mentioned book more class conscious, depicting the 1781 rebellion of the abused common soldiers of the Pennsylvania Line of the Continental Army against their officers. It was a successful book, in this respect. Sterling North, in the World Telegram, characterized The Proud and the Free as "treason", the story of a "social uprising" and "violent class prejudice" that "Moscow should make required reading in all Soviet schools" (quoted in Masses and Mainstream, 3 [Nov. 1950], 90).

29. Socialism: Utopian and Scientific (NY: International, 1935), 32. Stalin, despite his monstrous faults, appreciated the realism of this perspective: "Bourgeois constitutions usually limit themselves to recording the formal rights of citizens without concerning themselves about the conditions of exercising these rights, about the possibility of exercising them, the means of exercising them. They speak about the equality of citizens, but they forget that real equality between master and workman, between landlord and peasant is impossible if the former enjoy wealth and political weight in society, while the latter are deprived of both; if the former are exploiters and the latter are exploited" (Stalin on the New Soviet Constitution [NY: International, n.d.], 15).

30. "The Revival of the Communist Party" (preamble to the constitution of the CPUSA), New Masses, 56 (Aug. 1945), 5. This was after the expulsion of Browder for revisionism.

31. Consult the introductions and selections from James S. Allen (ed.), Thomas Paine (NY: International, 1937); Philip S. Foner (ed.), Thomas Jefferson (NY: International, 1943); Philip S Foner (ed.), George Washington (NY: International, 1944); Samuel Sillen (ed.),William Cullen Bryant (NY: International, 1945); Elizabeth Lawson (ed.), Samuel Adams (NY: International, 1946); and Philip S. Foner (ed.), Franklin Delano Roosevelt (NY: International, 1947).

32. Mindel, "Benjamin Franklin," Political Affairs, 26 (May 1947); Sam Darcy, "On Benjamin Franklin" (letter), New Masses, 30 (Dec. 27, 1938), 19; Carl Reeve, "Benjamin Franklin -- Champion of Democracy," The Communist, 18 (July 1939), 594-605; Granville Hicks, "A Great American," in Granville Hicks in the New Masses, p. 369; Francis Franklin, "July 4th. -- Birthday of American Democracy," The Communist, 17 (July 1938), 630-41; Claude G. Bowers, Earl Browder and Francis Franklin, The Heritage of Jefferson (NY: Worker's School, 1943).

33. Arnold Johnson, "The Communists Fight for the Traditions of July Fourth," Political Affairs, 27 (July 1948), 579-85; Abner Berry, "The Fourth of July, 1947," Political Affairs, 26, (July 1947), 571-75.

34. "A Prominent American Communist" (Browder), quoted in The Communist International, 1919-1943, ed. Jane Degres (NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), III, 472.

35. Louis Budenz, This Is My Story (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1947); Al Richmond, A Long View From the Left: Memoirs of an American Revolutionary (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973); Joseph Starobin, American Communism in Crisis, 1943-1957 (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972); David Shannon, The Decline of American Communism (NY: Harcourt Brace, 1959); Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, The American Communist Party: A Critical History, 1919-1957 (Boston: Beacon, 1958).

36. Wildly divergent views are found in M. Dzhunusov, "The Relationship Between the National and the International, and Its Distortions by the Maoists," Communist Viewpoint, 5:1 (1973), 47-55; Alan Freeman, "The Nation and the Transitional Epoch," International (London; journal of the Fourth International), 3:1 (Spring 1976), 28-50; June Dreyer, China's Forth Millions: Minority Nationalities and National Integration in the People's Republic of China (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976); Horace Davis, introduction to The National Question: Selected Writings of Rosa Luxemburg (NY: Monthly Review, 1976); Herbert Aptheker, The American Revolution, 1763-1783 (NY: International, 1960), 277; Herbert Aptheker, "Patriotism and the Nation," Political Affairs, 34 (July 1955), 28.